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SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: FM MILOSOSKI ON KOSOVO RECOGNITION & NAME NEGOTIATIONS

REF: SKOPJE 143 AND PREVIOUS

CLASSIFIED BY: P/E CHIEF SHUBLER, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) IN A FEBRUARY 29 MEETING WITH THE CHARGE, FM MILOSOSKI REITERATED THE GOM'S STANCE THAT DEMARCATON OF THE KOSOVO-MACEDONIA BORDER SHOULD BEGIN BEFORE MACEDONIA RECOGNIZES KOSOVO. SKOPJE ALSO WANTS TO AVOID ANY DISCUSSIONS WITH PRISTINA OF THE 2001 SKOPJE-BELGRADE AGREEMENT ON THE BORDER THAT MIGHT SUGGEST KOSOVO IS INTERESTED IN CHANGING THE ACTUAL DELINEATION OF THE BORDER. MILOSOSKI WAS NOT OPTIMISTIC ABOUT CHANCES FOR AN AGREEMENT UNDER THE NIMETZ PROCESS ON THE NAME DISPUTE, AND THE GOM EXPECTS A GREEK VETO OF ITS NATO CANDIDACY AS A RESULT. THE CHARGE URGED THE GOM TO ENGAGE FLEXIBLY AND ACTIVELY IN THE NIMETZ PROCESS. HE NOTED THAT THE USG IS WORKING IN BRUSSELS AND ALLIED CAPITALS TO PERSUADE GREECE NOT TO VETO, BUT UNDERScoreD THE IMPORTANCE OF PROGRESS IN FINDING A MUTUALLY AGREED RESOLUTION OF THE NAME ISSUE IN ORDER TO MAXIMIZE PROSPECTS FOR SUCCESS. END SUMMARY.

KOSOVO RECOGNITION AFTER DEMARCATON PROCESS BEGINS

¶2. (C) DURING A FEBRUARY 29 MEETING WITH THE CHARGE, FM MILOSOSKI CONVEYED GOM CONCERNS REGARDING KOSOVO DEPUTY PM KUQI'S FEBRUARY 28 PUBLIC STATEMENT INDICATING THAT MACEDONIA SHOULD RECOGNIZE KOSOVO BEFORE DEMARCATON OF THE KOSOVO-MACEDONIA BORDER COMMENCES. THE GOM FOUND THAT STATEMENT "UNHELPFUL" AND INCONSISTENT WITH THE DEMARCATON PROVISIONS OF THE AHTISAARI PLAN. THE GOVERNMENT HAD RESPONDED POLITELY BUT FIRMLY TO PM THACI'S LETTER ON KOSOVO RECOGNITION, NOTING THE AHTISAARI PLAN'S PROVISIONS FOR FORMING A JOINT TECHNICAL COMMISSION (JTC) TO BEGIN PLANNING FOR DEMARCATON.

¶3. (C) MILOSOSKI ASKED THAT THE USG SHARE WITH PRISTINA THE GOM'S CONCERNS THAT KUQI'S STATEMENT HAD BEEN UNHELPFUL, ESPECIALLY AT A TIME WHEN MACEDONIAN CITIZENS FELT BESIEGED BY GREEK THREATS TO VETO MACEDONIA'S NATO CANDIDACY AND WERE WARY OF THE THREAT OF A SERB EMBARGO IN THE EVENT SKOPJE RECOGNIZED KOSOVO. IT WOULD BE USEFUL, HE CONTINUED, IF PM THACI REITERATED HIS EARLIER ASSURANCES TO PM GRUEVSKI THAT KOSOVO WAS WILLING TO BEGIN FORMING THE JTC, EVEN IF

RECOGNITION WAS NOT IMMEDIATELY FORTHCOMING. MOVING AHEAD ON DEMARCATON WOULD REINFORCE PRISTINA'S "POSITIVE IMAGE" AND WOULD GIVE SKOPJE A USEFUL, CONCRETE ARGUMENT TO USE WITH ITS PUBLIC IN FAVOR OF RECOGNITION.

¶4. (C) IF THE DEMARCATON PROCESS DID NOT BEGIN SOON, MILOSOSKI SAID, THEN RECOGNITION PROBABLY WOULD HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL AFTER THE NATO SUMMIT IN APRIL. WITH A NATO INVITATION IN HAND, MACEDONIA WOULD BE IN A STRONGER POSITION TO WEATHER NEGATIVE PUBLIC REACTIONS TO PRISTINA'S INSISTENCE ON RECOGNITION BEFORE DEMARCATON. LEFT UNSAID WAS WHAT MACEDONIA'S POSITION WOULD BE IF IT DID NOT/NOT RECEIVE AN INVITATION AS A RESULT OF A GREEK VETO (SEE BELOW). THE GOVERNMENT WANTED TO AVOID "LONG DISCUSSIONS" BETWEEN SKOPJE AND PRISTINA ON THE BORDER DELINEATION CONTAINED IN THE 2001 SKOPJE-BELGRADE AGREEMENT, WHICH COULD RAISE PUBLIC CONCERNS ABOUT HAVING TO "CHANGE THE BORDER." IN RESPONSE TO THE CHARGE'S QUESTION REGARDING THE TIMING OF RECOGNITION, MILOSOSKI SAID THE GOM WOULD EXPECT THE JTC TO BE FORMED FIRST, AFTER WHICH RECOGNITION COULD FOLLOW.

NATO AND THE NAME -- "WE NEED A HELPING HAND, NOT ARM TWISTING"

¶5. (C) MILOSOSKI REITERATED EARLIER GOM DESCRIPTIONS OF THE RECENT NIMETZ PROPOSAL (REFTEL) FOR RESOLVING THE NAME DISPUTE AS "COMPLETELY UNWORKABLE." THE GOVERNMENT HAD BARELY AGREED TO STAY ENGAGED IN THE NIMETZ PROCESS AFTER ITS INITIAL DISMAY AT THE CONTENTS OF THE PROPOSAL. WHAT MACEDONIA NEEDED, HE SAID, WAS "A HELPING HAND, NOT ARM TWISTING." NATO'S STRATEGIC PRIORITIES, MILOSOSKI CONTINUED, "SHOULD NOT BE CORRUPTED BY ONE OF ITS MEMBERS." MACEDONIA DID NOT WANT TO BE PART OF A CAMPAIGN TO SAVE PM KARAMANLIS'S GOVERNMENT FROM FALLING. THE US, HE SAID, COULD USE ITS LEVERAGE WITH GREECE BY THREATENING, FOR EXAMPLE, TO JOIN TURKEY'S FOOTNOTE ON NATO DOCUMENTS IF ATHENS WIELDED ITS VETO.

¶6. (C) THE CHARGE REITERATED THAT THE USG'S GOAL OF A NATO ENLARGEMENT THAT INCLUDED MACEDONIA REMAINED UNCHANGED, AND NOTED THAT WE WERE WORKING IN BRUSSELS AND IN OTHER ALLIED CAPITALS TO PREVENT A GREEK VETO. ALTHOUGH GREECE HAS THE OBLIGATION TO RESPECT THE 1995 INTERIM ACCORD, THE THREAT OF A VETO IS REAL. WE WANTED TO EXTEND A HELPING HAND TO SKOPJE, NOT TWIST ARMS, IN ORDER TO REACH A MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE SOLUTION TO THE NAME ISSUE. BUT MACEDONIA HAD TO BE FLEXIBLE IN NEGOTIATING, AND HAD TO STAY ENGAGED IN THE PROCESS, IN ORDER FOR US TO BEST BE ABLE TO PERSUADE ALL NATO ALLIES, AND PARTICULARLY GREECE, TO SUPPORT AN INVITATION.

NEXT STEPS -- EXPECTING A GREEK VETO

¶7. (C) MILOSOSKI SAID THE GOM WOULD WAIT FOR NAME NEGOTIATOR AMBASSADOR DIMITROV TO REPORT BACK FROM THE TALKS ON THE NIMETZ PROPOSAL THAT WERE TAKING PLACE ON FEBRUARY 29 IN NEW YORK. THE PRIME MINISTER, PRESIDENT, AND MAIN POLITICAL PARTY LEADERS WOULD THEN MEET TO DISCUSS NEXT STEPS. THE OPPOSITION, HE CLAIMED, ALREADY HAD ACCUSED PM GRUEVSKI OF HAVING "COMMITTED TREASON" FOR HAVING AGREED TO A COMPOSITE NAME FOR INTERNATIONAL USE. (COMMENT: AN OPPOSITION LEADER DID/DID LEVEL A TREASON ACCUSATION AGAINST GRUEVSKI'S MINISTER OF INTERIOR, BUT NOT AGAINST GRUEVSKI, AND THE CHARGE WAS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE MINISTER'S ALLEGED MISHANDLING OF A PRO-NAME PROTEST IN SKOPJE. END COMMENT.)

¶8. (C) MILOSOSKI SAID THE GOM EXPECTED PM KARAMANLIS TO VETO, FOR DOMESTIC POLITICAL REASONS, EVEN IF THE TWO SIDES REACHED AN AGREEMENT IN THE NAME TALKS. THAT WOULD ALLOW KARAMANLIS TO PAINT FM BAKOYANNIS'S EFFORTS TO RESOLVE THE DISPUTE AS A FAILURE, STRENGTHENING THE GREEK PM'S POLITICAL HAND. HE SAID HE THOUGHT IT WAS UNLIKELY THAT THE TWO SIDES WOULD EITHER REACH AN AGREEMENT, OR AN AGREEMENT TO AGREE, BEFORE THE APRIL NATO SUMMIT. THE CHARGE URGED CONTINUED MACEDONIAN ENGAGEMENT IN THE NIMETZ PROCESS, AND SUGGESTED SKOPJE WORK TO SHAPE THE DIRECTION OF THE TALKS BY PUTTING FORWARD WHAT IT COULD ACCEPT IN THE NIMETZ PROPOSAL AND NEGOTIATING ON THE POINTS IT FINDS PROBLEMATIC. EVEN IF A FINAL AGREEMENT

CANNOT BE ACHIEVED BEFORE BUCHAREST, REAL PROGRESS OR AN "AGREEMENT IN PRINCIPLE" COULD POSSIBLY PERSUADE GREECE TO LIFT ITS VETO THREAT. MILOSOSKI REPLIED THAT THE MACEDONIANS WERE "OPTIMISTS," BUT WOULD NOT "ALLOW OUR PRAGMATISM TO BE USED TO PAY FOR THE POLITICAL MISTAKES OF OUR GREEK NEIGHBORS."

COMMENT

19. (C) FROM MILOSOSKI'S DESCRIPTION, THE GOM APPEARS RESIGNED TO A GREEK VETO. HOWEVER, PRIME MINISTER GRUEVSKI REMAINS THE PRIMARY DECISION MAKER. THE LACK OF ANY APPRECIABLE PROGRESS IN THE NIMETZ TALKS IN NEW YORK OVER THE MARCH 1-2 WEEKEND LIKELY HAS FURTHER REINFORCED MACEDONIAN FATALISM ABOUT THE ULTIMATE OUTCOME OF THE TALKS, AND THUS THE COUNTRY'S NATO PROSPECTS. WE WILL CONTINUE PRESSING FOR MACEDONIAN FLEXIBILITY AND ENGAGEMENT, BUT THE GREEK GOVERNMENT'S FIRM, PUBLIC VETO THREATS ARE HAVING THE EFFECT HERE OF HARDENING RESISTANCE TO THE IDEA OF MAKING COMPROMISES THAT MIGHT PERSUADE GREECE TO LIFT ITS VETO THREAT.

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